

3
The Excellency of the Righteous.

A
SERMON,
Preached March 30. 1729. at the
FUNERAL

Of the REVEREND

Mr. Joseph Crompton,

Late Rector of *Normanton on the Soar*, in
the County of *Nottingham*;

Who had also been a DISSENTING Minister.

By ROBERT MARSDEN,
Rector of *Rempston* in the same County.

To which are added,
Some LETTERS of Mr. CROMPTON;
in which is given some Account of his
coming over to the Church of *England*.

L O N D O N:

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W. Musgrave.





To the Honour'd

Mrs. Isabella Crompton.

M A D A M,

IN compliance with your request, I have yielded, that the Sermon I preach'd at your husband's Funeral may be made publick. Tho' I have a juster notion of the performance, than to value my self upon it; yet I conceive, it may in some measure answer your pious design of giving it about in your Parish; and perhaps be further acceptable to a few religious minds, within the narrow circle of my acquaintance. If it should also happily incline and persuade any persons that read it to holiness of life, help to fix our own people in the Communion of our Church, or prevail with our Dissenters to have a better opinion of it, (as, by the blessing of God, it may;) I should then give over blushing, thank the opportunity you are pleas'd to give me of doing a little good, and joyfully bear the censures of some upon a mean Script, that had the least tendency towards the promoting the welfare of the publick. But be the event what it will, I easily see with what

DEDICATION.

gratitude I ought to resent your engaging me in this affair.

And I must particularly acknowledge the recommendation you allow my hasty papers, in permitting me to annex Mr. *Crompton's* Letters to them. For they do plainly breathe forth a spirit of true Christian piety and moderation; chalk out that temper of mind, which qualifies to discern and embrace the truth; wisely direct us to the properest means for it; and set before our eyes a winning example of sincerity. On which accounts, as they will be grateful and a stay to unprejudic'd minds, so, in my opinion, they are like to be very prevalent with his old friends, to disentangle them from many of those prejudices against our Church, which they unhappily lie under.

That the God, who maketh men to be of one mind in an house, may daily more and more unite all the members of our Church and Nation in love, and faith, and holiness, is the frequent and hearty prayer of him, who is, with great respect,

M A D A M,



Your Humble Servant,

R. O. M A R S D E N.



PROV. xii. 26.

The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour.——



OW by the word *righteous* is meant here, not only the *just*, or *honest* man, as that is opposed to *knaveish*; but the *godly*, *religious* or *virtuous* in the general, in opposition to the *ungodly*, the *vicious* or *wicked* in any kind; as it follows in the Verse, --- “The way of “*the wicked* seduceth them:” the word *righteous* being often taken in this Sense in holy Scripture, in this book of Proverbs, and particularly in the 6th, 7th, 10th, and 12th verses of this chapter.

And by the *neighbour* of the righteous we are to understand the *unrighteous* or *wicked*; the good and bad being usually mixed together in the same neighbourhood, and their concerns being strangely interwoven with one another. They often fight under the same banner, sail in the same Ship, travel together in the same road; nay, live together in the same village, or under the same roof: and there is scarce any condition of life, any age or place assignable, *in which the righteous has not the wicked for his neighbour.*

B

Lastly,

Lastly, when the text tells us, that the righteous is *more excellent* than his neighbour, it means to set our notions right, as to persons and things; and to assure us, That the righteous is always the wiser, and better, the more useful and valuable man.

That I may yet further clear up the meaning of the assertion in the text, I would beg you carefully to observe, on what point the comparison between the righteous and wicked turns.

Now we do not compare them together upon the account of any natural perfection; as, strength of body, beauty, good parts, or the like:

Nor on account of the goods of fortune; noble birth, great riches, high places, &c.

As to both these, it may suffice to say, That the righteous and the wicked stand upon the same level; that there is nothing in righteousness that hinders any goods of this kind; but on the contrary, righteousness greatly preserves, promotes and improves them.

But herein we compare these two together, namely, Whether of them has better improved his capacity and opportunities of being and doing good in the world: and we make no scruple to determine the question in favour of the righteous.

The meaning of the text being thus explained, I shall now shew after a familiar manner, "That the righteous is more excellent than the wicked:" and then make some practical improvement of the point in hand; part of which I will make as suitable as I can to the present mournful occasion of our meeting together in this place.

And that the righteous is more excellent than the wicked, will appear,

I. By considering wherein the excellency of a man, or a Christian may be supposed to consist.
And,

II. By

II. By giving you a short character of the righteous.

I. For the first of these, the excellency of a man, or Christian, consists in the following particulars.

---- In something that is good in itself, that is voluntary, that is difficult, and that always yields him a rational satisfaction. And

--- 1. The excellency of a Christian consists in something that is good in itself.

We are not here enquiring, who comes nearest to perfection in ill and hurtful qualities: nor, who is eminent in trifles. Those are a reproach to us, and these can add no beauty to our character.

--- 2. The excellency we are enquiring after lies in something that is voluntary.

For man being a rational creature, and reason being made up of the understanding and the will, it must needs be, that that cannot be ascribed as a perfection to a man which he does not chuse, and which his will is not less or more concerned in; as in the practice of virtue or vice.

But here, to prevent any mistake, observe, I pray, That I do not suppose, that now (since the fall of our first parents) man has it naturally in his power to embrace virtue in a saving way: no; but I thankfully believe, every Christian has it in his power to do so, by the grace of God preventing and assisting him, in his regular use of the means of grace: and this makes no alteration as to the particular before us.

--- 3. As the excellency of a Christian lies in something that is good and voluntary, so must it

be difficult too; or else it will hardly merit our esteem and commendation.

This observation holds in all arts and callings; as in musick, oratory, poëtry, the law, the art military, and the rest. One great reason why we value an artist in any profession, is because it is pretty hard to arrive at the top of it; and we generally slight and nauseate what is of easy acquisition, and tamely yields to the first attempts we make upon it. Just so it is here, in the case of righteousness, religion, or virtue: it requires many repeated endeavours, much consideration, care, contrivance, resolution, labour and long patience to become master of it. The foundation of it must, ordinarily, be early laid in a religious education; and yet, after that, we are constantly in the way of temptation. Tempted we are with the world, the gauderies and vanities of which early take our hearts and fancies, before we know what they are: tempted with the flesh, (our corrupt lusts, passions, and humours,) part of our very selves; which we are apt fondly to over-love: and lastly, dangerously tempted with the devil, an invisible enemy; whose snares are laid in darkness, and his wiles subtle; aptly suited to our constitution, education, age, sex, calling, circumstances; strangely fitted to deceive and please us, and cunningly conveyed into our conversation, friendships, our very meat and drink, and almost every sensual delight. So that you see the *righteous* man is by his very profession a Soldier: he is to engage with the world, the pleasures, the interests, the honours of it; to avoid, resist, subdue them: he is to overcome himself; one of the hardest and noblest victories: and, (as if all this was not enough,) he is to fence against the infinite malice of Satan; governed and conducted by great natural sagacity, and long experience, and
excited

excited by his general Success. And you know, this cannot be done, without our setting the strictest guard upon ourselves, without watchings and fastings: we must deny ourselves in a thousand instances, deny our old acquaintance, familiar friends, and dear relations; be deaf to their intreaties, resist their importunities, and fly from every temptation as from the face of a Serpent, till we have *cut off* (in the language of our Saviour) *our right hands, pluck'd out our right eyes*, and so a-new moulded our nature as to have vanquish'd the dominion of sin, and got an entire victory over our own will. And lastly, this is to be, less or more, our regular and daily employment; our enemies, as in a conquer'd country, being always ready to revolt, and to improve every opportunity to our disadvantage: so that in mere policy, we must persevere in our religious warfare unto the end.

And here it is, that we leave the wicked behind us; who like perverse or lazy coursers, partly do not set out right, or discouraged (it may be) by the badness or length of the way, soon give out or lagg behind, and never hold out to the end of the race; and so come short of the prize.

And indeed, if we duly consider what has been said upon this head, we must needs allow the practice of religion to be attended with many difficulties. Nay, they would be altogether insuperable, did we not wisely take all the advantages we can, for our help and encouragement in this weighty contention; set the noblest patterns before our eyes, God, our blessed Saviour, the holy angels, the saints; make a regular conscientious use of the means of grace in publick and private; often renew the sense of our duty on our minds; think on the terrors of the Lord; call in the di-
vine

vine assistance by our hearty prayers; and lastly, anticipate our future happiness, by our frequent meditation upon the joys of it.

By all which it appears, that the labours attending a religious course of life, tho' not so great as justly to discourage any one, are yet such as not to be despised, and as deservedly reflect great honour upon him who overcomes them.

--- 4. The excellency of a Christian must be placed in something which always yields him a rational satisfaction.

And as to this, what is there that can compare with our holy religion? What more noble in it self than to imitate, and to become like God? And by what can the dignity of our nature be more highly advanced? Or, what is more truly reasonable, than to spend our lives and all we have, in the service, and to the glory of God who gave them?

This we can do, and this we ought to do; (every one in his station;) and he that does it, has a fountain of joy and satisfaction continually springing up within him: his hope is strong and lively, and he can never possibly be put out of conceit with himself. For even when good men come to die, (at which time, surely, we may believe them serious,) do they use to repent of their good actions, say they have been mistaken in doing them, spent too much time, pains, or cost about them? Or, do they advise their friends and relations, to continue in their wickedness?

Oh, no! Rather, then, they more earnestly repent them of their sins; (their many slips and failings) they fear they have not been good enough; they censure and accuse themselves with much severity; deeply bewail their many negligences and ignorances; fly to God's mercy in a Saviour,

Saviour; recommend the strictest piety to those about them; and sincerely profess, that were they to lead their lives over again, they would spend them more directly in the service, and to the glory of God: and the same breath that said this, carries their pious humble souls out of their bodies into the mansions of the blessed.

And more than this, 'tis also much to our purpose to remember, That not only these good men, but the wicked themselves, when on a sick-bed, and within sight of death; they, I say, then, (if they be not harden'd in sin,) take up the lamentation of the righteous, seem to be sorry for their sins, desire the prayers of those about them, and bid 'em beware of following their bad example.

All which are signal testimonies on the side of virtue, and convincing proofs of the excellency of it.

The same useful doctrine may further be proved, not only to reason, (as in the foregoing arguments) but even to sense too, by considering the many good effects which religion visibly produces in the world: and this will fitly fall in with my

II. Second general head; which was to give you a short character of the righteous: by which, if duly applied to what has been said before, it will as evidently appear, that *the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour*, as that the righteous is the righteous, or that any identical proposition is true.

Now the righteous is one, who in the constant tenor of his life and actions, endeavours to approve himself to God, by a conscientious discharge of all those duties which he has prescribed him.

--- 1. And in the first place, he lays the foundation of his obedience in faith, and early piety towards God. He is very devout and frequent in his addresses to him; in prayer, for the supply of his wants; in praises and thanksgivings, for the blessings he enjoys. He daily converses with God, and walks with him; and thinks, and speaks, and acts, as in his presence. He gladly embraces every opportunity of hearing and reading God's word, of meeting him in his holy ordinances, and contemplating his perfections: these alone can compleatly fix his thoughts, and ravish his understanding: these alone can attract and detain his love, and satisfy the infinite longings of his will. In a word, the righteous man enjoys God as much as he can here; and prays, and longs, and hopes to do it, in God's good time, more perfectly in heaven.

--- 2. The good man is not unmindful of the duty he owes to himself; to his soul and body.

He endeavours to furnish his soul with all sacred and useful knowledge; that belonging to his station more particularly; and to adorn it with the brightest virtues. He does not so much strive to hide his faults, as daily to overcome them; nor to conceal, so much as really to govern his passions; tho' he thinks it his duty rather to hide, than impudently expose any thing that is amiss in him. He strictly, (and in the fear of God) censures and regulates his very thoughts; checks every unreasonable and foolish motion, fancy, and desire in his breast; there he engages, and there he most successfully baffles Satan; and always plays the critick the most severely upon himself.

Again, The righteous man is strictly temperate, sober, and chaste, and makes it matter of conscience, (as well as of reputation and good husbandry)

bandry) to be so. He thinks his health is a rich treasure, a sacred trust committed to his keeping; and that it will preserve him in a sound mind, and enable him to discharge with pleasure the several duties of his calling; and believes he must give account to God for it: and so he would not endanger it needlessly, and upon every trifling occasion; nor use to drink any man's health to the prejudice of his own: and his invincible shield against the pleasing insinuations of sensual delights is religious thoughts, daily prayers, keeping out of ill company and the way of temptation, and demanding of himself (and others, as occasion requires) "How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" *Gen. xxxix.*

9.

To conclude this particular, The righteous man is perfectly meek and humble, and contented under every change of fortune and circumstance. He knows God governs the world, and is content he should do so: and if adversity befalls him, he is sure he has deserved it; and if prosperity, he accepts it with a thankful, but a trembling hand; as that which may betray him to a multitude of evils. In a word, in either condition he is not unmindful of the other; he sets not his mind on any thing this world can give, and can take away; but stedfastly looking up to God, without any reserve he quietly commits all to the wisdom, power and goodness of his Father which is in heaven; saying always in any private changes, in all publick calamities, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good," *1 Sam. iii. 18.* --- "He punishes me (us) less than my iniquities deserve," *Ezek. ix. 13.*

--- 3. And lastly, The care the righteous man takes of his duty to God and himself, does not

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make

make him forgetful of his neighbour. Oh, no! He is very sensible that no man is born for himself alone, but, next to the promoting the glory of God, and the saving his own soul, for the good of others; his family, his parents and relations, his friends and neighbours, his country; yea, and as opportunity serves, the good even of all men.

He is therefore usually contriving how he may be capable of doing the most good in the world; particularly, in the way of his station. He is resolved, in the first place, to do no evil, (this is always in his power:) to be just to his word, his oaths, his contracts; to be affable, obliging, hospitable. He does not withhold the pledge, betray his trust, refuse to pay his debts, nor deny justice to the meanest person alive. If himself be injured, he would rather forgive than punish; and does not wish the confusion, but the repentance of his adversary.

If his neighbour be oppressed, he becomes his patron; if poor, he relieves him: he is (as he can be) "an husband to the widow, a father to the fatherless, feet to the lame; and eyes to the blind;" a refuge and shadow to the afflicted. Where he cannot do good himself, he cheerfully procures it by his friends and interest; and where other means fail, his bright example, his good conversation, wise counsels, seasonable reproofs, and devout prayers conspire to supply those defects.

Consider the righteous in every relation and state of life, and you must needs love him. Is he a master? he is just. A servant? faithful. A parent? tender. A child? dutiful. An husband? loving. A friend? constant even in adversity. If he be a subject or private person, he keeps himself in his place, studies "to be quiet" and do his own business," and to make his governors

vernors easy. If in authority, he makes wholesome laws, enlivens them by his example, takes due care of their execution; and, (like the sun in the firmament, yea, like God in heaven,) sheds the happy influences of his government far and wide upon the evil and the good; these he encourages, and restrains those; and so wisely tempers his mercy and justice together, that the bad may neither want the means of reformation, and of being happy, nor be capable of disturbing their better neighbours and the public good.

Lastly, The righteous judge, magistrate, or prince, carefully employs all the opportunities he enjoys for the benefit of those who are plac'd under him; "rules them prudently with all his power;" and so demeans himself in his high station, as always to be mindful there is one higher than he, and that he must shortly be called to resign up his Sceptre to the King of kings.

And thus you have seen (my brethren) the great excellency of the righteous man above the wicked. He is liker the good angels, and liker God: he is a greater blessing in every circumstance of life, happier in every condition: fitter he is always to enjoy poverty or riches, health or sickness; fitter to live, and fitter to die; to be a peasant or a prince.

I would yet, (besides what has been said) be permitted to lay before you the testimony of God, in favour of the useful point we are upon.

Besides then the noble character that *the righteous* is adorned with in the text, it is very observable, That the Scripture every where abounds with the praises of holiness and religion. "'Tis called perfection, Gen. xvii. 1. ---- extolled

“ above rubies, *Prov.* iii. 15. --- stiled the one
 “ thing needful, by our Saviour:” and, in a word,
 food and raiment are not so necessary, nor life so
 lovely, nor gold so precious, nor honey so sweet.

And if the Scripture had been every where si-
 lent as to this particular, and God had not set
 these illustrious characters of holiness so thick
 there, yet we should easily have collected the
 high value of holiness from those precious pro-
 mises and glorious rewards that are there annexed
 to the attainment of it: and on the other side,
 from those dismal threatnings and dreadful pu-
 nishments that discourage and pursue the obstinate
 commission of sin.

We will suppose, if you please, a King had
 two favourite courtiers, both unknown to us;
 only we had heard, That the one was suddenly
 advanced to the highest post of honour, and the
 other degraded from the post he was in, thrust into
 prison, and afterwards condemned and executed:
 should we not conclude in such a case, That the
 first had done some eminent piece of service to the
 Crown, and the other had turned rebel and traitor?
 And then may we not argue with much
 greater certainty concerning his dignity, whom
 the King of heaven delighteth to honour? Since
 he does not love or hate, reward or punish, rash-
 ly or partially, nor is disturbed with those passions
 which human nature is exposed to?

From all which it appears, That if the judg-
 ment of God may be taken in the particular be-
 fore us, “ The righteous is, indeed, more ex-
 “ cellent than his neighbour: and surely, not he
 “ who commendeth himself, (or, whom man
 “ commendeth) is approved, but whom the Lord
 “ commendeth.

And

And thus I have gone through the particulars I propos'd to speak to in proof of the assertion in the text; a point capable of easy proof, and therefore more fit both for me to undertake, and you to hear: however, a point that is not more easy, than it is profitable; as will plainly appear by your religious attention to the use I am going to make of it. And

1. If the righteous be more excellent than his neighbour, then it is certain that virtue and vice have a fixt and unalterable nature, which does not depend on the pleasure of kings and princes, nor upon any human constitutions.

God is, of all other, the most excellent being: man is like God as to the faculties of his soul: and this likeness is increased and perfected, when we steddily pursue the proper good and improvement of the mind; which is wisdom and holiness, or, (in one word) *Religion*.

Can it be an indifferent thing, think you, Whether a creature serves his Creator or no? Whether or no, we believe the truest, follow the guidance of the wisest, fear the greatest, love and imitate the holiest and best of beings? Whether children are dutiful to their parents, or no; or whether, next to God, we honour those whom he hath placed over us? Or, can it be an indifferent thing, whether we place virtue in the extremes, or (between them) in the golden mean? Whether we eat or drink too much? Or, lastly, whether, in the instances of justice, equity, mercy, and charity, we do to others, as we would they should do to us? 'Tis true indeed, that Kingdoms can ill subsist, unless on the foot of religion: but to argue from thence, that religion is the invention of state-policy; is as if one should assert,

assert, that a pilot made the pole-star, because by it he governs his ship in his navigation. However, since it cannot be denied, that the belief and practice of the great truths and duties of religion tend so much to the advantage of civil government, it must be owned that the state is ever obliged to aid and support it; and that kings and queens, not only in duty, but even in point of interest, should ever be “nursing fathers, and nursing mothers to the church.”

2. Since righteousness is so excellent a thing, let us heartily thank God who has made it the condition of our future happiness.

We do not only hope for happiness when we come to heaven, but holy men are already possessed of some portion of it in their way thither: and this much enhances the value of religion. There have been aforesaid, and even now there are, too many Atheists in the world; but had God taken no notice of virtue, but only required us to have been endued with strength, beauty, worldly wisdom, riches, honours, or the indulging in sensual pleasures, in order to our being saved; then surely there would have been ten Atheists for one now: and as those have usually been the fewest and most contemptible, they would then have been the greater, wiser, and better part of mankind; the truly wise and good would have refused even Salvation it self, upon such dishonourable conditions.

3. If the righteous be more excellent than his neighbour, then ought you to frame your notions of things and persons agreeably to this truth, and to give righteousness its due place in your esteem and judgment.

'Tis

'Tis the splendor of riches and worldly honours that dazzles the eyes, and the allurements of pleasures that take up the heart of a great part of mankind: but it's sacred and useful knowledge and true virtue alone, which truly enoble, distinguish one person from another, and go the nearest to deify a man. 2 Pet. i. 4.

Whereas, if you take away these, the other, I mentioned, are partly, worthless things; scattered, as with a careless hand, among the good and bad, and given and recalled at pleasure: and partly, they are low and leveling qualifications; such as basely degrade persons of rank into the low degree of the vulgar, and sink our rational nature into that of brute-beasts: they are also, partly, unfociable and hurtful possessions. If patching and painting, and artificial cringing; if base flattery, and a little formal and artful grimace; if exquisite skill in sports and gaming; if indulging in ease and idleness, in women and wine; if these be the accomplishments, we are to value ourselves upon, then may the meanest Servant soon vie excellency with his Master: and, if this was all, *+ and Mist* the tribe that wears liveries would soon turn their Lords out of doors; neither could even the laws prevent such violence, were it not for the assistance of real, or (at least) pretended virtue.

4. If the excellency of virtue be such as you have heard, then it is your duty eagerly to pursue it in the course of your lives, and to promote the practice of it in others, as you meet with opportunity.

Without this, whatever can be said to recommend virtue would be to no other purpose than shamefully to reproach your degenerate minds with an enslaved affection, an impotent fondness for sin; and to render you more and more inexcusable

ble at the last day. The sermon that does you no good, does you hurt. Open then your eyes to behold the fair beauty of holiness: daily set before yourselves the glorious and eternal reward of it: taste and see how good it is; and love and cleave to it as it deserves.

And then persuade and win over your friends to it: make holy leagues and combinations on the behalf of religion, as men do for the carrying on their trades and worldly concerns: train up your dear children, command your servants and dependants to be good and holy; and let this always be one of the preliminary and chief articles of their coming to live and abide with you. So will you find peace in your own breasts, make your families easy and happy, be exemplary and reputable in your neighbourhood, derive the blessing of heaven upon you and yours, and truly and effectually express the real and great esteem you have for the duties of our holy religion.

5. If the righteous be more excellent than his neighbour, then will every thing be highly valuable in our eyes, that has any notable tendency towards the making men righteous.

Such are the means of grace; as, the word of God, the holy Sacraments, the several parts and duties of publick worship, the ministers of Christ, the religious education of children, pious meditation, keeping good company: in a word, all the ordinances of religion, either in publick or private. 'Twere easy to shew the duty, the praises, and good effects of all these out of the holy Scriptures; but I shall content my self at present only with hinting, That since they plainly have an immediate and powerful influence on the making men religious, on that account, they highly merit our regard.

We

We value means, as they tend to their end: and the more noble the end is, so much more honourable are the means that tend to it: and since righteousness is so excellent as you have heard, and evidently makes our precious souls, (our bodies too) meet for eternal happiness, we can hardly over-value the means of grace, which make men righteous. 'Tis certain, we ought to value them next to righteousness it self.

6. If the righteous be more excellent than his neighbour, then it is highly reasonable to have in great estimation such persons among you, who are eminent for religion and piety.

“ They are the lights of the world, and the salt of the earth:” they preserve our wicked cities, and stand in the gap between us and God’s judgments. You are therefore heartily to thank God for the great blessings you enjoy in their example; to make them easy, and, in the course of your lives, gladly to follow the religious pattern they set you.

7. And because, alas! these excellent persons some time or other must die, we cannot be supposed to do justice either to my text, or their memory, unless, with a decent and christian concern, we lament the loss we at any time sustain in their removal from us. And this concern should always rise in proportion to the several degrees of their merits, whose loss we mourn: and this will give me occasion to do justice, in some measure, to our reverend brother, in order to your edification.

Be pleased then to take notice in the
1st place, That he was born of Parents, one
of which, (his mother) was a Dissenter from our
D Church:

Church: born also in a Country where the Parishes are large, the Ministers few, and the Curates (many of 'em) ill provided for and mean. Upon the death of his father, he was bred up in his mother's way, (but this the best among the Dissenters) the way of the Presbyterians: which gives a better education, and is less enthusiastick than that of the other Dissenters, and approaches nearest to the Church of *England*.

In this way he was designed for the Ministry, and in order to it, sent, (not to one of our Universities, but) to a private School or Academy, of good account; in which way of education, would naturally be instilled into him such notions as would tend to disaffect him to the way of our Church.

2. Suitably to such way of education, he is after made a Minister among the Presbyterians, and continues in that Ministry eighteen or twenty years, with a conduct unblameable among them.

He had also a small School among them. But for several of the last years he is dissatisfied in the way of his Religion; and upon long, diligent, and proper enquiry, he becomes sensible that his education had indeed led him into many hurtful mistakes, and made him guilty of Separation from a Church, where the word of God is truly preached and the Sacraments duly administered, and with which one may communicate without sin: and he is on good grounds convinced of these two things: First, that the Bishops immediately succeeded the Apostles in the Church of Christ, and have ever since continued in it; and Secondly, that Forms of prayer are not unlawful: which two were the chief objections he had been taught against our Church.

And

And this accident contributes to his conviction: Mr *H---* a dissenting Minister of good account, keeping a School near *Derby*, and fearing to be prosecuted on that account by Mr. *B---*, then a notable Schoolmaster in that Town, to avoid the prosecution, was thinking to receive the Sacrament in one of the Churches there. He invites our deceased brother to bear him company; who refuses, till, at his request, he had carefully perused the Communion-service, especially, and discerned it to be good: and then they both received the Sacrament, &c.

3. And our Reverend Brother deceased, when become, after some years, thoroughly sensible of the soundness of our Church-frame, presently leaves the Dissenters, and a Congregation which he had among them, which afforded him a decent maintenance; comes over to the Church of *England*; and, without any prospect of preferment, casts himself on the good providence of God.

And now, my brethren, I pray consider a little with me, how hard and commendable a thing it is, to make such a change as our dear brother has done.

Our religion, indeed, in our Church-way, is admirably good, and the very Truth itself. And as the religion of the Church of *Rome* is very corrupt; so, as to the Protestant Churches, after many years enquiry, (in which I have wanted neither will nor opportunity to search and inform my self,) I find none so pure, nor so nearly resembling the first Churches of Christ, as our Church is. Our Church is such, that the Congregations in our Nation, dissenting from us, ought to come over to us, but we ought not to go over to them.

And yet how hard a thing is it for our dissenting Brethren to do this? Education you know, obliges us to read such books, take in such a set of notions, opinions and principles, follow such teachers, keep such company, chuse such for our friends; and our dealings in the world are commonly, (by these means,) determined to persons of our own education and religion: and we are apt to look upon those of another way, as mistaken, as strangers in a manner, if not enemies in some degree, and not to have the same good opinion of them, nor affection for them, as for those of our own Religion.

And hence we commonly find, that a man becomes and continues a *Jew*, a *Turk*, a *Papist*, merely because his parents were such, and because he was brought up in that way; tho' we know, that all these religions are very absurd, false and wicked. So great is the force of early education. It is like a deep mark or incision made in the bark of a young tree: it grows, and widens, and usually lasts as long as the tree does. A man therefore stands in need of bright illuminations, strong convictions, pure affections, and firm resolutions, to break through and overcome the power and many prejudices of a false education; and more particularly this is observable in the business of religion, in which our opinions are apt to make much the deepest impression upon us. And he who does so break through these difficulties is much more commendable than he, who being brought up in the right way, never goes astray from it.

Such as this, by the grace of God, the God of Truth, was the wisdom, the integrity, the resolution of our reverend deceased Brother: he *did* see, --- he *did* break through the aforesaid pre-

prejudices; and he becomes a member of the Church of *England*.

4. And being such, you need not doubt of his being frequently attacked by his old friends, the Ministers, to bring him back to his old way: but he stands his ground; and, (as the Apostle requires, 1 *Pet.* ii. 15.) “is ready always to give an account to every man that asked him a reason of the hope that is in him, with meekness and fear.”

5. Well: Now after some considerable stay, he seeks for Orders in our Church from the hands of the Bishop, who alone (he is convinced) could give Orders in a Gospel-way: and after good and sufficient testimony of his holy life and conversation, and due examination as to his abilities in theological (or holy) learning, he is made a Minister by a Bishop, one of those Bishops, who are ornaments to their high places.

6. Then the good Providence of God, and the bounty of his patron, open him a way to the Rectory of this Parish.

7. And here, ye, my beloved, ye of this Parish, are witnesses, “how holily, and justly, and “unblameably he behaved himself among you.”

He gave no occasion at any time to suspect the sincerity of his conversion to our Church; but as at his Ordination and Institution by the Bishop, he had solemnly promised, and set his hand, to obey the laws of it, (as we, all the Ministers, do,) so he constantly kept up, and conformed to the rules of it. If for some time after his coming hither, he received visits, now and then, from some of the dissenting Ministers, your equity and charity

charity will give him some indulgence in this particular. There might be some relation in the case: old friendships are not suddenly broke off: those Ministers could not shake his constancy; nay, part of their business with him might be to seek for information at his hands, in order to consider duly of those reasons that made him a Convert; and we need not doubt, but, (as our Lord commanded *S. Peter*, *Luke xxii. 32.*) "being converted himself, he would, by all the prudent methods he could devise, strengthen his Brethren." He, who has been so unhappy to have been misled himself, and has afterward found out his mistake; he, more naturally pities the mistakes of others: he is also, in some respects, better qualified to bring them back into the right way.

Again, our reverend Brother all along kept up his respects to his Patron, (as every Clergyman should study to do) and, to make what recompence he could for his bounty, and his having misled others, It is pretty remarkable, that in a Parish which is not large, which is near the Church, and which used not to be so happy; and in a neighbourhood where that is not the custom, he did double duty in the pulpit every Lords-day, when his health would admit of it.

I might now go on to relate to you the way of his conduct in his parish, family and neighbourhood: but your perfect knowledge of this, will only permit me to be short on this head.

I may have leave to say, That in conversation he rather chose to speak well, than to talk much. He was very gentle, humble, candid, peaceable; he was perfectly sober, temperate, just; busied in his own affairs, and in rendering his own conduct

duct unblameable; and seldom at leisure to find fault with others.

His house, for the constancy and regularity of his Devotions with his family, and those that depended on it, was as a Chapel: and with the assistance of a religious and prudent wife, whom God had blessed him with, and whom he valued and loved as she deserves, it has also been for many months a kind of hospital in a very sickly season, and the sick, (the poor of this Parish especially,) use to find both Doctor and Apothecary there. I, among many others of my Brethren in the ministry, have often experienced his chearful and liberal hospitality: and from our frequent observation of his inoffensive and prudent behaviour, we, the neighbouring Clergy round about, have willingly received him into our familiarity; and have made no distinction between him and those Ministers who have been bred up in our own way, and lived many years among us.

In a word, our reverend Brother deceased, lived as he taught, and strengthened and redoubled the light of his doctrine by that of his good example.

This is an imperfect account of our dear deceased Brother.

I was before observing from my text, That if the righteous "be more excellent than his neighbour," then it is a duty upon us to be truly sensible and sorry when we lose any such person from among us.

The want of this is set down as a mark of stupidity by the Prophet, *Isa.* lvii. 1. "The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart,"-- And when *Stephen* died, we read, *Acts* viii. 2. "devout men carried him to his burial, and made
" great

“ great lamentation over him:” and, as members of Christ, and of one another, we that are Christians should sympathize in one anothers joys and sorrows; and, upon occasion, “rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep, *Rom. xii. 15.*

And here I might open a wide flood-gate of sorrows, which might not so easily be stopped again: it will be therefore more fit to hint what may rather assuage your grief, and to turn the stream of my discourse and your thoughts another way.

Be pleased then to call to mind the comforts the Scripture affords us upon the death of our friends, what reasons for patience under our afflictions, and what use we should make of the character I have given of our dear Brother.

1. And *first*, of the comfort, which the Scripture affords us in the death of our friends.

Rev. xiv. 13. “ I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them. —

Luke xxiii. 43. “ To day, (says our Lord to the penitent man) shalt thou be with me in Paradise. — *Acts vii. 10.* When he, (*Stephen*) had said this, he fell asleep. — *Joh xi. 11.* Our friend Lazarus *sleepeth*; [*i. e.* is dead] and our Saviour awoke him, *ver. 44.* —

1 Thes. iv. 13. — “ I would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others which have no hope.

“ For if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him, &c. Our

Our religious friends then, when they die, enter into a place of rest. Their souls are received into happiness; and their frail bodies are not more dishonourable in the grave, than they shall be made glorious at the last day. It is therefore matter of Christian joy to us, when we consider, that the Spirits of such are made perfect.

2. For patience under our afflictions.

We mourn now, if we take it rightly, not for the deceased, but for our selves; for our own loss in him.

Here also, our temper, our patience is required and assisted.

1 *Sam.* iii. 18. "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good. ——— *Job* ii. 10. "shall we receive good at the hand of God, and "shall we not receive evil? ——— i. 21. Naked came I out of my mother's womb, &c. ——— *Luke* xxi. 42. Not my will, but thine be done. " ——— 2 *Sam.* xii. 23. I shall go to him, but "he shall not return to me.

God can take nothing away from us which he had not before graciously given us: we must leave him to do what he will with his own: his time of recalling our comforts is the best: he can make us ample amends when he pleases: he designs our amendment by his chastisements, and it will be our wisdom to amend, lest a worse thing come unto us.

3. I come now, lastly, to shew what use we should make of the character of our reverend Brother deceased. And

1. Remember his good doctrine.
2. Follow his good example.

1. Remember his good doctrine.

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This

This relates to you, his constant hearers. *Luke* viii. 18. "Take heed how you hear. —"
 "x. 16. He that heareth you heareth me, &c.
 " — And *1 Cor.* xv. 2. Ye are saved, if ye
 " keep in memory what I preached unto you.
 " — *James* i. 25. Not forgetful hearers,
 " but doers of the word. — *2 Pet.* i. 15. I
 " will endeavour, that you may be able after my
 " decease, to have these things always in remem-
 " brance." — The duty, this, both of Mini-
 ster and people.

2. Follow his example.

--- 1. That particular instance of it which relates to his becoming a member of our Church. His sincere enquiry after Truth; his hearty embracing it, when he had found it; and this, in the midst of many discouragements, and to the great disadvantage of his temporal interest.

And here, for the sake of some few persons who may not be so thoroughly satisfied as to the way of our Church, (if any such should chance to be present,) or, however, to confirm and comfort our own members in their adherence to it, I beg your attention a little, while I mention to you a few particulars which will bespeak your favourable opinion of the Church of *England*.

The Christian Religion being grossly corrupted by many false and dangerous tenets, introduced by Popery, it was found necessary to make a thorough Reformation of it, in the reigns of King *Edward VI.* and Queen *Elizabeth*, and to leave the Church of *Rome*: as *2 Cor.* vi. 16, 17.
 "What agreement hath the temple of God with
 " idols? — Wherefore come out from among
 " them, — separate, — touch not the
 " unclean thing, &c." This Reformation was
 made in the most regular and publick manner, by
 our

our godly and learned Bishops and Clergy; —

The word of God in the holy Scripture was the rule: there we left the Papists, where they had left the truth: and all the States of the Nation joined in making the change; a privilege, in which the Reformations abroad, of *Luther* and *Calvin*, were not so happy.

Ever since our Reformation, the Church of *Rome* has been busily endeavouring to destroy us:

--- By a bloody persecution in the reign of Queen *Mary* the Papist: In which Archbishop *Cranmer*, *Ridley*, *Latimer*, and *Hooper*, some of our most holy and learned Bishops, were burnt at a stake, and two or three hundred more, Clergy, and People, of both sexes: And thirty thousand forced to flee out of the land, as martyrs and confessors for the truth of our holy Religion.

--- By troubling the long reign of Queen *Elizabeth* with many rebellions at home, (both in *England* and *Ireland*) and invasions from abroad; particularly, that of the *Spanish Armado*, (the invincible *Armado*,) a huge fleet, which was to swallow up the little fleet of *England*, and after that, make an easy conquest of the Nation.

--- Also, by sowing divisions among us: and this was done by the Bull of Pope *Pius* the Vth, and by sending over Popish Priests and *Jesuits*; who should pretend extraordinary purity and tenderness of conscience, and (under this pretence) spread pamphlets to disaffect the people from the establish'd worship as corrupt, and creep into Meeting-houses, and there preach, and load our Religion with base and false calumnies, and draw 'em off from us as to some purer way of worship: and several of these Popish Missionaries were discovered and exposed, and some of them punish'd as they deserv'd; as particularly, *Heath* and *Cumin*.

--- By framing the Gunpowder-plot in the beginning of King *James* the First's reign: a design to blow up the King and Parliament, at a time, when there was no dispute, as to the King's rightful succession to the throne: from which plot, we have every year since, (now for above a hundred years) in obedience to our Laws, been thankfully commemorating the happy deliverance of our Church and Nation, on the fifth of *November*.

--- By the *Irish* Massacre in King *Charles* the First's time.

--- Lastly, (as many of us know) by the attempts of King *James* the Second, who (without the remarkable interposition of a gracious providence) had soon effected the ruin of our Church, in a regular and legal (I mean, a Parliamentary) way.

--- I might add, by espousing and fomenting at this time the interest of the Pretender; which is, one way or another, engrafted on our differences with all Popish powers abroad; and which has now, for many years, been so great a charge to the Kingdom.

By these, and the like means, has the Church of *Rome* been endeavouring the ruin of our Church since the Reformation of it.

Now after the consideration of these particulars, I leave it to every unprejudic'd person, who thinks calmly, and reasons soberly, to make his judgment of our Church; and to give in a verdict to his own conscience, Whether (in the opinion of even the Papists themselves) the frame of our Church be not plainly opposite to Popery.

Would the Church of *Rome*, think ye, have made these attempts against us, if she had reckon'd us among her friends and Allies? Who is it, I pray, that restlessly endeavours by force and fraud, by fair and foul means, by lies, by defama-

tory

tory libels, by treachery, poison, by massacre, stabbing, by drowning, by fire, by sword, to hurt the name, alienate the affections, divide the interest, weaken the power, destroy the lives of their friends, and of those they love? These are not the tokens of friendship. No, the Church of *Rome* plainly hates the Church of *England*: and it hates us, because we have put the Bible, in *English*, into our people's hands; because we allow them to pray in our Liturgy in a known tongue, and understand what it is they are required to say *Amen* to; because we have purged the Liturgy; freed it from Ceremonies, which are partly hurtful in their nature, and obscuring the simplicity of the Gospel; partly light, theatrical, and ridiculous in their manner; and lastly, perplexing and burdensome through their great multitude: because we have freed it from false and hurtful Legends; from superstitious and absurd doctrines; (that monstrous one of Transubstantiation, in particular;) from Devotions address'd to Angels, the Virgin *Mary*, or any of the (true or imaginary) Saints departed; from the blasphemy of the Mass, and prayers for Souls in Purgatory: because our Catechism adds no new Articles to the Apostles Creed, drops not the second Commandment, nor requires any of the seven Sacraments, but only Baptism and the Lord's Supper, as generally necessary to salvation; because of our thirty-nine Articles, fourteen of which are clearly against it; because several of our Homilies (particularly, that long and learned one against Idolatry) do plainly confute her doctrine: Lastly, because our Canons, Injunctions, and Church-Laws oblige our Ministers to subscribe and often to preach against it, and are altogether agreeable to our frame; and because our Civil Laws and Acts of Parliament, take our Ecclesiastical Constitutions

tions into their protection, and enforce their observation by civil and temporal penalties.

My Brethren, it is for these and the like reasons, that the Church of *Rome* hates the Church of *England*.

2. Again, 'tis surely some honour to our Church, that even our Brethren, the Dissenters, often favour us with their attestation to our safety, at least, in our communion with it; as may appear by what follows.

--- 1. Before the Act of Indulgence, the greater part of them lived in constant communion with our Church.

--- 2. Every Dissenting Minister is now by the *Act of Indulgence* [*Toleration*] obliged to subscribe to all the thirty-nine Articles, except three, and part of a fourth; which they all accordingly do.

--- 3. In order to their obtaining some place of honour, trust, or profit under the Government, that they may qualify themselves for it in a legal way, we see the Dissenters of the best sense and quality, frequently tendering themselves to receive the holy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in the way of our Church. At which time they do these three things: They join with us in our praying by way of form; they pray also for the Bishops; and they conform to the ceremony of kneeling, when they receive it. And we charitably believe, they do every thing of this, without sin, and with a good conscience. I add, there is no Ordinance in Religion, in which we are more closely united to Christ our head, and to one another, as fellow-members of his body, than the Sacrament of our Lord's Supper: nor can we give one another a surer pledge of such union, and of our being one body, than "by our being" "all partakers together of that one bread." 1 Cor. x. 16, 17.

--- 4. Our

--- 4. Our reverend Brother deceased, upon due consideration, thought it his duty (to the great prejudice of his temporal interest, and without any secular views) to leave the Dissenters, and join himself to our Church: and lately, (moved, it may be, by the same reasons, influenced also by his example;) another dissenting Minister, of great account amongst his people, in this neighbourhood, and of good revenue, is also come over to us, and since made a Minister in our Church.

I might add, That the Minister of the chief Parish in the Town of *N*——, (a man of great learning and zeal for religion and virtue) was educated at the same time with our reverend Brother deceased, in the same school of the Dissenters; that his late Curate, Mr. *W*——, now one of the Ministers in the Town of *D*——, was a dissenting Minister. I might give you more instances of this kind; but I chuse to mention these, because as they are late, so they all lie near and in a little compass, and are, (or may be easily) known to you.

Again, in populous places, we are so happy as to see several Dissenters of good account, coming over and adhering to our Communion; and many more of them, upon some particular occasions, (as marriages, or funerals, or the appearance of some of our celebrated Preachers in our pulpits,) frequently resorting to our Churches.

Now all these are so many clear testimonies of their opinion, that it is innocent and safe to communicate with our Church; and some of them, that it is also a duty to do it.

And when, on the one side, we consider the wise and religious frame of our Church; and on the other, the sincerity of many of our Brethren that dissent from us; and further, reflect on such instances

instances as I have given, we are in good hopes, that those among them, who are well educated, considerate, moderate, and of sincere and ingenuous tempers, both Ministers and People, will, (as the reverend deceased did) be frequently coming over to the Communion of our Church.

As for those of other dispositions, (while they continue such,) they are rather led by their passions and by-views, than moved by reason and a conscientious regard to their christian duty. We therefore have no hopes of them; but we shall not cease to pray even for them, "if peradventure God will give them repentance, to the acknowledging of the Truth.

Thus upon occasion of the Conversion of our reverend Brother, I have thought it my duty to lay before you some considerations in favour of our Church: and in doing it, have chosen to wave all nice, obscure, and disputable arguments, and contented my self with those clear ones, which arise from the consideration of plain matter of fact, such as the known conduct of both the Papists and Dissenters with regard to our Church.

And now, my Brethren, I commend it to you, to consider well of what I have said unto you in the fear of God; and to do justice to my argument, and to your own consciences. And I may have your leave to think, after what has been said, That the reasons which keep the Dissenters from constant communion with us, will appear but very thin to you, or, rather none at all: and therefore, we have the more reason to hope both for their conversion every day, and also that the good people among our selves will think it their duty to cleave inseparably to the Communion of our establish'd Church: For which two good ends, I have laid these considerations before you.

--- 2. And lastly, as we may receive benefit by the example of our reverend Brother's sincerity in his leaving the Dissenters and coming over to our Church, as soon as he perceived it to be his duty to do so; so should it be our hearty endeavour to follow him in all the other instances of his holy life and conversation.

A good example demonstrates virtue practicable, draws comely lineaments and beautiful strokes upon the face of it; and the loadstone hardly draws iron to it more naturally, than a good example bespeaks and attracts the imitation of those who observe it. It represents in little, all the particular duties of Religion; and, at the same time enforces all the motives that persuade to the observation of them. 'Tis easy to understand this exhortation, *Do as I do*; and the advice is strong on the side of virtue, when we know it comes out of a good mouth.

Besides, every good example we are acquainted with, lays us under an obligation to follow it; as helping us to a mean for the easier attainment of righteousness; that excellency in the text, which it is so much our duty, our wisdom, our interest, our honour to aim at, in our passage through this World.

To conclude: Was it then the Duty of the Reverend deceased to be *a pattern of good works*, and was he so? You are carefully to copy after that pattern. He was a man of like passions with you: Therefore, you may be good, as well as he. He was your spiritual father: be ye therefore, as loving children, followers of him, as he also was of Christ. He was your Pastor, went before you in the ways of piety: you your selves therefore know how you ought to follow him, as sheep the good shepherd,

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Thus

Thus shall you avoid those wolves, who scatter
and hurt the flock: you shall more easily attain
to the sublime grace in the text; “ and thereby,
“ be made meet to be partakers of the inheritance
“ of the Saints in light.” *Amen.*



• A COPY



*A COPY of a LETTER
to the Rev^d Mr. Hartley,
at Ashby-de-la-zouch in
Leicestershire.*

Dear SIR,



THAT which is the occasion of this Letter, you (and a few others) had long ago been acquainted with; but that I thought it would not be agreeable to you: and for a considerable time I was uncertain, whether I shou'd ever have occasion to mention it to any body. Therefore I have kept it wholly to my self, to this day; although I have had an inclination, and sometimes purposes to do otherwise. But now I must open my mind to you: and I desire you to read what follows, still retaining that friendly disposition towards me, which you have used to have, and which I thankfully acknowledge.

It was in the year 1711, that I begun to think more seriously and freely about Conformity to the establish'd Church, than I had done before; and to have some inclination to it. The first occasion whereof was a motion made by Mr. H---ll to receive the communion, upon *Good-Friday* that year, in one of the Parish-Churches in *Derby*; which accordingly we did at *St. Peter's*. Upon this occasion I perused the Communion-Service, and some other parts of the Liturgy to be used

that day. And the end, which I propos'd, being mine own edification, I endeavour'd to prepare my self for the service, and join in it with the same seriousness and devotion, as if it had been in one of our own congregations; without prejudice against the different way us'd in the establish'd Church. Thus doing, I thought, I did well attain my end, *viz.* mine own edification; and that the manner of communion there us'd did conduce thereunto.

Hereupon I was somewhat inclined to this Communion; and some things in our own mode of worship helped on this inclination. But Conformity appearing a great step, and the thoughts of it being new to me, I did not give way to them. However, this led me to attend sometimes the *Friday-Lecture at All-Saints*, and to look into the Book of Common-Prayer, and Act of Uniformity, and some other things. And from that time I began to take more notice than I had done, of what I met with in my reading, relating to the difference between Conformists and Nonconformists: and I proceeded to form a design of acquainting my self more thoroughly with the terms of Conformity, in order to pass a judgment upon them. But I made little progress for a long time, for reasons I shall mention by and by.

Christmas following it was mov'd to receive the Sacrament at St. *Werburch's*, on *Christmas-Day*; and it was design'd to do so: but, there being a Sermon that day at the Meeting, we omitted it, lest offence should have been taken.

But on *Good-Friday* 1712, we received at *All-Saints*. And after that, I my self did the same there on *Good-Friday* every year, while I stay'd at *Derby*, to the best of my remembrance. In the mean time I attended the *Friday-Lecture* sometimes, as is before said: and always, when I did
 so,

so, I joined in the prayers, and conformed to the mode of worship prescribed : and if I had not been satisfied to do so, I think, I cou'd not have been satisfied to continue my attendance there, as I did, (or to do the like in any place of worship,) as a Spectator and Hearer only. The use of Book-Prayers and Responses were indeed new things to me; there being no visible forms, nor so much as an *Amen* to be heard in our Congregations, as utter'd by the people. But coming with a mind serious and unprejudic'd, and as if none had seen me, but God only, I found that way of publick worship adapted to my edification. By this means my inclination to that way increased; and I had many thoughts about it, comparing it with *that* of the Dissenters: and I was the better qualified to make a judgment of the matter, making trial of both.

However, as before said, I made little progress in the intended examination. Sometimes I thought of it much; sometimes I neglected it. The reasons and occasions of which flow proceeding were various.

For, in the first place, my mind was over-awed with an apprehension, that Conformity is, in common estimation among the Dissenters, looked on as a very ill thing; that I should be thought to do nothing less than change my Religion, and represented as an Apostate. Some would be displeased, some troubled at it: and I would not willingly displease or trouble any. I must expect to be not a little talked to, and talked of, and more or less perhaps engaged in dispute; things disagreeable to one that loves quietness and retirement, as I do. This consideration, I think, made greater impression upon me, than in reason was due to it, (if it do not so still;) for enquiring into the reasons that might probably dispose people

people to be so affected towards me for this change of communion, I suspected them to be such, for the most part, as that no great respect was due to them. However, the greatest respect is due to God, and to mine own mind; and it imports more to be an honest man, than to be either Conformist or Nonconformist. God loves all good people, as such: Men are apt to love those of their own party, as such. To be concerned at a person's changing his Communion is allowable in some respect and degree, and unavoidable sometimes: but tho' I consider that, yet the pre-apprehension of persons being affected more or otherwise, than is due, *merely* at my conforming, hath been a trouble to me: fearing greater stress is laid upon Nonconformity, than sincerity and real Goodness. The appearance of greater regard for party, than real Goodness, amongst all parties, hath given me some offence. As likewise, I have been puzzled in resolving this question; How it comes to pass, that persons so commonly continue in the communion in which they have been educated? Unless it were an indifferent thing, in what communion one lives; or unless Education could, some way or other make that right, which otherwise would not be so. But to proceed.

Another occasion of my delay was, That from the time I first had thoughts of this matter, for several years, Dissenters were under more discouragements than they had been formerly. They were more spoken against, and made the objects of popular rage: some laws were made to their disadvantage, and greater hardships were feared. Had I conformed then, nothing could have saved me from the suspicion and scandal of doing it from a base and unworthy principle. At the same time, how was I prepared to suffer in and for a cause,

cause, as to the justness and necessity of which I was not satisfied? So that this circumstance of the times might possibly have brought a difficulty upon me, had they grown worse to the Dissenters, as was feared. But, blessed be God, those times, which were so threatening to all good Protestants amongst us, (Church-men and Dissenters,) are now happily over; and the laws which were a grievance to Dissenters, ready to be repealed.

Another discouragement was from my temporal circumstances. For if I had conform'd, I must have lost all the means of my subsistence. I had little of mine own: and when I should get any thing in the establish'd Church, and what, was (and is) a great uncertainty; they of that Church being reckon'd shy towards Converts, and I having very little acquaintance amongst them. This made me not very hasty in pursuing my design. I turned my thoughts to saving as much as I could out of my little income, by a greater frugality than I had used before.

In the year 1715, I went to live at *Little-Iretton*; and in the year following, my Brother at *London* dying, left me part of his estate; so that I hoped, when I had that, I should have a competency to live upon, when other means failed.

Another cause of this delay was, I had a great desire to be fully persuaded in mine own mind: and my judgment concerning the matter, did not ripen so fast, as that of another person perhaps would have done with the same application of thought. And perhaps I have been too negligent in applying my thoughts and studies to it: tho' in the whole, it has cost me a great deal of time, and thought, and pains.

In 1717, Mr. *Hacker* invited me into his Family: I comply'd; tho' my inclinations to conform were then grown pretty strong. I told him, I
had

had thoughts of making such an alteration in my condition, as that my stay was not likely to be very long: which general words I intended presently to have explained to him; as having great confidence in his good-will to me: but I had not courage enough to do it. And lately I acquainted him with the same thing again, in the same general way, and with my design of removing at *Lady-Day*, upon this account: *that* being the time when I intend to make this alteration. And I design e're long to acquaint the people at *Ireton*, and Mr. *Shaw* for *Losco*, with my purpose to leave off preaching at those places, at the same time.

I could not intend so considerable an alteration in my circumstances, without intending also to acquaint you, my very good friend, with it. My fault is, that I have been too shy of doing it, and put it off perhaps too long. I desire you to excuse it: you know the reason.

As before said, I have taken a great deal of pains to inform and satisfy my self about this matter. I have both written and read a deal about it. Upon this occasion I have perused the Liturgy, and Book of Orders, Articles of Religion, Canons, Books of Homilies, Apocrypha, Assembly's Confession of Faith and Directory, some Acts of Parliament, the Conferences at the *Savoy*, *pro* and *con*, and papers of petition to King *Charles*; *King*, *Boyse*, *Calamy*, *Peirce*, *Corbet*, and something of *Baxter*, &c. and consulted several places of holy Scripture, as quoted. I have conferred with no body about it: but I have read what I thought was most likely to give me satisfaction, and more against Conformity than for it. Besides which, I have earnestly begged of God to direct and guide my mind the right way; that I might do that which is most pleasing to him,
and

and whereof I should not have cause to repent afterwards. This hath been the matter of my request to God for several years past. And I can truly say, that when I have been in the most serious frame, and my mind most abstracted from the world, and from all manner of worldly views and influences, my judgment and inclination to conform hath continued: Which I have looked upon, as an argument of my sincerity in this matter.

The Arguments, that have principally prevailed with me, are these two.

1. Whereas one main difference between the establish'd Church and the Dissenters is, that the former useth a Liturgy for the publick worship of God, and the latter useth none; I, for that reason, prefer the former.

2. Altho' I did not think the former *in itself* preferable, but somewhat inferior to the Dissenters Churches; yet believing it to be for the main good, so far, that all things necessary to my edification and salvation may there be had, without complying with any thing in itself sinful, I think, so much is due to publick Order, Peace, and Charity, that for the sake of these I ought to submit to the publick Establishment, though less perfect, and *in itself* less eligible. For, tho' we may not submit to any thing that is sinful, nor to a Service, in which we cannot attain the necessary ends of Communion; yet to one less edifying, I think, we may, and ought in some cases to submit: and I take this to be such a case, (supposing the establish'd Worship somewhat inferior to that of the Dissenters;) the consequences of a Separation being found to be so bad, with respect

to Religion, and the happiness of Society. For publick and private peace is, and hath been long greatly disturbed; and Love among Christians hath waxen cold, and a perpetual shyness and jealousy been kept up; and hatreds, and revilings, and violent contentions occasion'd; mens zeal turned from better things, and an edge given to all other differences. They who agree in the main things of Religion, have been set at a further distance from one another; and our common Enemies have had greater advantage against us. Mens wit, power, and passions, have been sinfully employed, upon this occasion, to uphold each their own party; and they have been tempted to design, say, and do, many unjust things for their own cause; and to condemn one another's Ministers and worship unreasonably; and so betwixt them to bring all into contempt. Not but that the Separation may have some good effects also; and that Imposers are in part chargeable with the ill effects, as well as they that oppose and separate; and not all that separate, chargeable with them neither: or, if they be, how can they help it, who think compliance sinful, and make their Separation with as little damage to Unity, Peace, and Charity, as they can? (Yet it is pity, methinks, that the Separation and difference is carried by the Dissenters so far, as it is, to the utter excluding all Prelacy and Liturgy; seeming to affect a distance from, and unlikeness to the establish'd Church. This, I think, is a fault.) But compliance not appearing to me sinful, I cannot avoid the force of this argument, taken from the consideration of things so lovely and desirable, as Unity, Peace, and Love amongst Fellow-Countrymen and Fellow-Christians.

But to return to the former of the forementioned Reasons.

Altho'

Altho' I know there are other points of difference between the establish'd Church and Dissenters, yet this, respecting Communion in publick prayers and administration of the Sacraments, and other parts of publick Worship, is with me the principal, and of greatest moment. And in this respect, I must own, that I think the established Church is better constituted than those of the Dissenters.

I know not where there are any so constituted as theirs are, with neither Liturgy nor Directory received amongst them. All the reformed Churches abroad, as far as I can understand, have always used, and do use Liturgies. For Dr. *Nichols* provokes the Dissenters to name a reformed Church without a Liturgy: and Mr. *Peirce*, in answer, produces none but *Scotland*: (and they, I suppose, have a Directory:) had there been any other, he would not have failed to mention it. The old Reformers in *England*, tho' they were some of them against the Habits, yet were none of them against a Liturgy, that I ever heard: for in the great contest between the *English* Exiles at *Frankfort*, both sides were for a Liturgy. In the time of the civil Wars, when the Book of Common-Prayer was abolish'd, and the use of it, by any person, in any place either publick or private, forbidden upon penalties, a Directory for publick Worship was establish'd, directing to the matter and order. But not so much as that is now received amongst the Dissenters. The *Presbyterian* Ministers at the *Savoy*-Conference say, "We wou'd avoid both the extreme, that wou'd have no Forms; and the contrary extreme, that wou'd have nothing but Forms." And yet the Dissenters have been in the former of these extremes ever since, almost threescore years, and seem to be fixed in it. The said Ministers proposed

posed a new Liturgy of their own, which, one wou'd have thought, they should have used, if they were, as they said they were, for some forms. But neither that, nor any other was, or is used amongst the Dissenters. (And indeed, the same Ministers at the Conference speak disrespectfully of Forms; comparing them to Spectacles and Crutches, fit for purblind and lame people.)

So that from the universal practice of the Dissenters, and from what *Dr. Calamy* and *Mr. Peirce* say, I conclude, that the Dissenters are against all Liturgies: though for peace sake the most moderate dissenting Ministers wou'd submit to the use of a well-order'd one, — “sometimes;” — “ordinarily;” — “in the entrance of publick worship;” — “supposing persons left at liberty to use or omit it.” — “Many, who now they have their liberty use no Liturgy, cou'd so far submit.” — “Their own method of free prayer is what, it is freely own'd, they generally prefer.” Thus *Dr. Calamy* represents the Dissenters; and speaks of a Liturgy, as to matter and manner unexceptionable, which they might join in. This shews a plain disaffection to Liturgies, if it be not a total excluding of them, till one is to be had so perfect, as is not to be expected: and even then it is only an inconstant and partial use that is proposed; and even thus much, not as eligible in itself, but only as what might be submitted to; and that by the most moderate of the Dissenters only.

But whether, or how far Dissenters are for or against Liturgies, yet none they have: And for that reason I cannot but prefer the mode of Worship in the establish'd Church before that of theirs. For to say the least of the establish'd Liturgy, it is better than none at all. This is my opinion; (tho' many Dissenters would say it's better

better to have none at all, than the best, that is or can be.) Even Dr. *Calamy* owns, "The Liturgy used in our Church to be, as to the main of it, pious and useful." I have the same opinion of it, and think some parts of it excellent, and therefore could chearfully declare my consent to the use of it, notwithstanding its imperfections.

I have seen the objections commonly made against it. To which I say in general: That it must be owned, several things need alteration and amendment; but that they are few in comparison of the rest that are to be liked; and that our edification, and all the ends of publick worship are well provided for notwithstanding: and what then, if it have some faults? Some of the things objected against are what I like it the better for. And of the rest some are inconsiderable, and all may be tolerable in some sense. People disaffected to *all* Liturgies, and educated in prejudice against *this* in particular, are apt to make the worst of things. If we may join in no service, but what is unexceptionable in every part, we might separate from all publick worship. And if it should be said, that we ought however to join with the most edifying and unexceptionable that can be had; neither is this a principle that I can admit. I am satisfied, the Dissenters do not admit of it; but determine their practice partly by other considerations. Persons in all communions submit to some things they do not like. The Dissenters way of publick prayer and administration of the Sacraments is open to as great, and greater faults and absurdities, than are in the Liturgy. And do not several things in the Dissenters worship actually need amendment, as to which things the Liturgy hath a better order?

The

The reading of the holy Scriptures is neglected more or less in their congregations almost universally. That Prayer which our blessed Lord himself made, cannot be admitted at all among some, and but inconstantly amongst others. No Creed or Profession of Faith is used, except at the administration of Baptism: and why it should not be a part of ordinary publick worship, I know not; nor why the Ten Commandments are not also made a part. These things are part of the reformed Liturgy, (as it is call'd;) and whether the Dissenters, by the omission of them, have carried the Reformation to a greater perfection still, is, I think, not hard to be determined.

One thing indeed they have much reformed, *viz.* the irreverent carriage that was too common formerly in the congregations of Dissenters; as, sitting at prayer; and men putting their hats on at Sermon. But I wonder why kneeling at publick prayers is so generally disused yet.

Mr. *Boyse* many years ago publickly recommended the more constant reading of the Scriptures in our assemblies: but I understand it hath been, and is generally neglected in *London*, and in some other parts. And it is so, more or less, generally every where, as far as I am acquainted: tho' I have heard several dissenting Ministers express their dislike of this, and wish this occasion of objection against us were taken away: which might be done without encroaching much upon the time desired for our own Composes: and if these gave way a little to the holy Scriptures, I think it would both do and be as well.

Tho' the way of praying used in our publick assemblies does not admit the people to join at all in uttering their own desires, (which I take to be a very great imperfection in our way;) yet, methinks, they shou'd utter their *Amen* at the end.

end. This the Dissenters do not object against, but plead for: yet in what congregation of ours shall we hear it?

But what I find most fault with is, that the congregation's prayers should wholly and always depend upon the direction, ability, and temper of the Minister; and that he should have so much upon him, as the making of these, at the same time that he is to use them, without any known prescribed matter or form: and that there are no known rules for worship received amongst them; no certain terms, (but the general rules and terms of Scripture, interpreted according to the discretion of the Minister) upon which Christian people and their children are admitted to the Sacraments. So that at Baptism, for instance, people presenting their children have no certain knowledge what questions shall be propounded to them, nor, consequently, what professions and promises they must make; this being in the breast of the Minister, 'till he propoundeth the Questions at the administration of the ordinance. The like may be said with respect to the other Sacrament.

That the people should be kept in such ignorance and uncertainty about the matter of their own service, depending so entirely upon the Minister for all the prayers they shall address to God, not knowing any part 'till they hear the Minister speak: and likewise upon what terms they and their Children shall be admitted to the Sacraments. Such a Constitution of things, as leaves people in such uncertainty, and gives to Ministers such a power and liberty, and putteth so much upon Ministers, I am not satisfied in.

For mine own part, I think I take too much upon me in the way of ministration, that I am in. The people seem to be made too much dependant upon the Minister; and the Minister to have

have too much upon him ; more than is fit. To some it is too great a discouragement, and oppression of mind to have prayers to make, always and wholly, when they are to use them in so publick a manner ; and a hindrance to their own devotion, especially at the entrance. If written, precomposed Prayers, as well as Sermons were in use, some Ministers, I believe, could address themselves to that part of their service with more chearfulness, than in the present way of free prayer, composed *ex tempore*. Such precomposed prayer would be free prayer nevertheless ; and there might be sufficient variety : which is all that is pleaded for, as far as I understand the drift of what is said on this head. But the Dissenters seem to affect variety too much, (both in sermons and prayers,) and things that are sudden and new.

But as different persons have different sentiments and gusts, as to these things, some thinking that to be unlawful or unedifying, or otherwise unfit to be complied with, which others think to be not only lawful, but most edifying, or otherwise most fit to be complied with ; I would have all persons so differently persuaded, to follow their own judgment and persuasions, (charitably and peaceably,) and none to be tempted to do otherwise by any methods or motives either of hope or fear. If this cou'd be done, I hope, no great harm wou'd be done by our different sentiments and practices in this matter.

To conclude, for mine own part, tho' I have endeavour'd to perform my service amongst the people, to whom I have ministred, in a profitable manner ; and I hope, I have done it, not only to mine own Edification, but to theirs also in some measure ; for both which I thank God : yet I have not been well satisfied with the Constitution of things amongst us : that there is no
received

received order and rule amongst us, except the general rule of Scripture; that so much is left to the discretion and ability of the Minister; and that forms of publick prayer and administration of the Sacraments, are so excluded as they are.

Perhaps you will say, it is as great a fault in the establish'd Church, that there is nothing but prescribed forms; that the Minister cannot use any discretion; and that free prayer is there so excluded as it is. To which I answer:

As to leaving things to the Minister's discretion, it is my opinion, that, whereas things relating to the publick Worship of God are of common concernment, it is most reasonable and fitting, that Ministers should be under such rules and orders in their ministration, as are agreed on by the common consent of those, for whose use their ministry is, and who maintain it. If this be called imposition upon Ministers, yet, I think, it is nothing, but what is reasonable and fitting. Provided, liberty to worship separately be granted to such, (both Ministers and people) as cannot in conscience comply with this common rule. For all Constitutions, which leave not due liberty to conscientious Dissenters, (both that in 1645, and that in 1662,) I dislike. Further;

That if some things be left to the Minister's discretion, it may be convenient and useful. That no Constitution of things is to be expected without some inconveniences; and that *that* amongst the Dissenters is liable to, and hath greater, than *that* establish'd: yet if *it* [*that* of the Dissenters] were the establish'd, I shou'd think my self obliged to submit to it, and chuse it, upon the account of the second Argument before-mention'd; tho' I cou'd not do it upon the account of the first. That in the establish'd Church some things are left to the Minister's discretion. That as to

free prayer, it is not excluded. It is allow'd and practis'd: so that what is wanting in the Common-Prayer, and is expedient to be express'd in publick prayer, may be done in *that* before Sermon. A liberty of instruction and prayer is also allow'd at the visitation of the sick.* And as to preaching, a Minister hath liberty enough. So that whatever is necessary or expedient to be said by him in publick, either in the way of instruction or prayer, may be brought in in his Sermon and prayer before it. And in fine, he may preach as well, and live as well, and be in all respects as good a Christian, conforming as non-conforming; being under as great obligations thereunto, and having as great assistances for those ends, in the former capacity, as in the latter. And as to capacity for usefulness, Ministers in the establishment have, as such, greater advantages by much, than dissenting Ministers commonly have. But to return;

Things being thus, I cannot but prefer the constitution and way of the establish'd Church, before that of the Dissenters, in this point respecting publick Worship; (which is to me the most material point of difference, as I before said;) notwithstanding the faults and imperfections of the Liturgy.

When I had read Dr. *Calamy*, I consider'd, what conclusion he would draw from his Objections and discourse. If he had only meant to infer, that several things in the publick Establish-

* Mentioning the Visitation of the sick putteth me in mind of an Error amongst us, as it seemeth to me; *viz.* that the Communion of the sick, who cannot come to the publick administration, is so generally disus'd and discourag'd; (not on the account of the Law) whilst at the same time private Baptisms of children, that might be brought to the publick Congregation, are so frequent.

ment need alteration and amendment, I cou'd have agreed to it. For, tho' I do not reckon all those to be faults, that he and other Dissenters do, yet it were to be wish'd several things were alter'd, even tho' there were not a Dissenter in *England* to be pleas'd or gain'd by it; and much more to attain so good an end, as uniting us more. But when he wou'd have this conclusion drawn, *viz.* that Nonconformity is justifiable, that is, that a separation of communion is necessary and warrantable; this is what I cou'd not, nor can agree to.

Thus I have opened my mind to you as a friend. It's likely you will think I am going into an error: but I hope also, you will think it no dangerous one; but that if I be a truly good Christian, (as a Conformist, I hope, may be,) I shall do well, and be a happy man nevertheless: and I am sure, if I be not so, I am miserable, whatever profession or communion I am of. The matters in dispute between Conformists and Non-conformists in *England* are such, as *in themselves* are of no great moment: as such, they endanger no man's salvation. Religion consisteth in being like God in all things: and as to Conformity and Non-conformity, take which you will for right, sincerity is better than either. It is not being of this or that Church or Communion, or party of Christians that makes us acceptable to God; tho' it go a great way amongst men towards making them acceptable to one another. If we worship him in sincerity, and with pure minds, tho' in different modes, shall we not be accepted? For substance, the worship of Conformists and Dissenters is the same. 'Tis true, we ought to worship God according to his will, to the best of our knowledge: but what if we be mistaken as to his will,

in some things relating to his worship? or what if he hath made no declaration of his will, appointing and determining particularly the whole matter, manner and adjuncts of christian worship? Does he regard whether we have a Book before us or not, when we pray? whether we use this phrase, or the other? whether we use the same words, or vary? whether we in conscience use one gesture or another? God looks at the gesture and frame of the mind. Tho' we should err in such like things, yet certainly it would be a greater Error in us not to follow our consciences and persuasions in them. God's thoughts of these things are not as man's. Men, by means of their education and converse, and the influence of friends and temporal circumstances; by their familiarity with some things, and unacquaintedness with others; and accustoming themselves to one way of acting and thinking; and perhaps by something in natural temper; or by some other means, are apt insensibly to contract prejudices for or against things, without, or beyond any thing in the nature of the things themselves, as a just reason for it, and to have narrow apprehensions of things; an undue fondness for some opinions, constitutions of Churches, and modes of worship, and an aversion against others; and too great an opinion of the necessity and importance of their own opinions and ways. Which imperfection cleaving to us in this imperfect state, cannot be wholly avoided or cured; but all men, I suppose, are forced to give way to it more or less. Only it were desirable that real and substantial Religion might be duly valued, loved and practised by all; and that Charity to one another might remain unhurt in the midst of our different apprehensions, (which way so ever got) about those things, about which truly good people may well be supposed to differ:
that

that so we might bear with one another in love, in those things, in which, we may hope, God will bear with us all.

But to go a little further: I must needs own to you, that I do think, that many of all persuasions, have been apt to lay too much stress upon, and place too much Religion in, the constitutions of the Churches whereof they are members, and the modes of worship in which they join: Nay, more than that, not only to lay too great stress upon the modes of things, but upon the very things themselves; as praying, preaching and hearing sermons, in comparison of natural and eternal Religion, consisting in truth, justice, goodness, charity, mercy, and other the imitable perfections of the most perfect and aimable Being. And it hath given me some offence, that I have observed these so great and essential parts of Religion spoken of, not with due respect, as I have thought.

Mr. *Talents*, in his *Large and sure Foundations*, (a book which I read with pleasure many years ago,) takes notice what mischief *Imposition* and *Opposition* have done. For mine own part, I like neither of them in the manner and degree, they have been, and are practised amongst us: and conforming is most consistent with such a mind. For separating communion is a great degree of *opposing*; whereas conforming is no degree of *imposing*. So it pleases me best to be neither amongst the *Imposers* nor *Opposers*. It's true, if I had that ill opinion of the Liturgy and Ceremonies, and terms of Communion in the establish'd Church, that the Dissenters generally seem to have, I should think my self obliged to remain a Non-conformist. But that opinion of them I have not; but a different one, and in the main a quite contrary one. What then should make me a Non-

Non-conformist? It is not other peoples sentiments by which I am to direct my practice, or which will justify me, if I do so.

I conceive, that according to the general principles of the Dissenters, I cannot be blamed for conforming, provided I am sincere in so doing. For, as far as I ever heard, it is universally agreed on, that those who can conform with a safe conscience, ought to do it. Dr. *Calamy* says, "Could we find constant Conformity lawful for us, we would soon yield to it." Mr. *Peirce* says, "That has been always the mind of the Dissenters, that as long as they could with a safe conscience, they were for continuing in the public Churches." Therefore I should go contrary to the mind of the Dissenters themselves; even *they* would blame me, if I should not conform, provided I can do it with a safe conscience; and as to that, no Dissenter sure will deny me the liberty of judging for my self. The Conformists distinguish between those who do separate for conscience-sake, and those who do not: (supposing there be some who do not:) the latter only they condemn. The former sort are under a necessity to separate: under the same necessity they are not to conform, that any others are under to conform. But being I cannot plead this necessity for mine own Non-conformity, who is it that will justify me in it? For ought I can find, both Conformist and Non-conformist will condemn my practice.

I think it best to make this Change now; for I have already put it off a long time. I may say, I have taken seven years to consider of it. Mine age is considerably advanced; so that it is time for me to fix. I may as well do it now, for any thing I know, as at any time hereafter: for I can think no other, but I must do it one time, sooner or later, if it please God I live. But if you
have

have any advice to give me against making the Change so soon, as the time before-mention'd, or against doing it at all, I desire to hear from you, as soon as may be. Or, however it be, I shou'd be glad to hear from you upon this occasion.

I have thought it not convenient to make my design publickly known long before the execution of it: because I cou'd not expect any satisfaction that way; and because I feared, I and my labours would presently become unacceptable to the Dissenters, as soon as my intention to conform shou'd be known.

What reflexions will be made upon me I know not: but I will hope for the continuance of your favour and friendship. I am not conscious to my self of being determined in this matter by any unworthy motives. I have no Friend or Friends amongst Conformists, by pleasing of whom to make advantage to my self. I have not kept company, or any way conversed with any Conformist, Minister or other, to prejudice me against Dissenters, and in favour of the establish'd Church. I have no particular view at all, of place or profit (of a temporal nature) in the Church, either for the present, or for the future. All the present view I have (of that nature) is to lose as good as fifty pound a year (thereabouts or better) for nothing. No one hath perswaded me to this thing; nor is any one, but God and my self, acquainted with it to this day. As for the Dissenters, I believe, they are many of them, honest, serious, and good people; whose temper and company is very agreeable to me; and amongst whom I might, for any thing I know to the contrary, live in competent esteem. From some of them I have received much friendship and kindness; which if I were not ready to acknowledge, I shou'd be ungrateful. Cou'd I have been a
Dissenter

Dissenter in principle, and heartily joined in that way, I believe, it might have been better for me, as to my circumstances and preferment in the world. But nothing of that nature is so valuable, as satisfaction to my own mind. My conforming cannot be imputed to prejudice or disgust, upon any quarrel or misunderstanding, or supposed ill usage or neglect from the Dissenters. There is no colour for that. As to the people, to whom I am Minister, (as well as the family, in which I live,) I have met with nothing, but due respect and encouragement; or rather that which is more than due. I am sorry to leave them: but that might as well have happen'd, if I had not conform'd. Friendly converse may still be continued, as there shall be opportunity; and some Communion in the exercises of Religion; and spiritual Communion, as there is between all good Christians. And if we in our different Communions and ways serve God in sincerity, and be, and still remain, truly religious, fearing God and keeping his commandments; then our being of such different sentiments and communions at present, is comparatively of no consequence: (tho' some thro' weakness, some for love of party may represent it as a great matter;) we shall meet in Heaven for all that, and be all one there. For which most happy Communion I pray God prepare us all.

I am,

Dear SIR,

Your Obliged Friend,

and Humble Servant,

Duffield,
Feb. 13. 1718.

JOSEPH CROMPTON.

*An ANSWER to a LETTER
from a Dissenting Minister.*

Little-Ireton, April 14. 1719.

S I R,

ONE thing that very much contributed to my conforming, was a persuasion, that the discourses of the Dissenters about Conformity consisted, in a great measure, of misrepresentation and aggravation; interpreting things to a worse sense than there is any necessity for.

This appears to me a general mistake on the Dissenters side, carried through almost all the controversy, with respect to the declarations, subscriptions, and particulars under them required.

And the rest, that is not misrepresentation, I believe to be inconclusive, as to proving a separation necessary and justifiable.

For tho' there be some things in the establish'd Church, that might be altered for the better, (and so far I admit some of the Dissenters objections,) yet they are to me, such as are tolerable. And it seems unreasonable to expect a constitution without tolerable faults and inconveniencies, and for want thereof to break Communion: especially to go into another way, which, (taking all things together) is not better, but worse than that which is left. Which I take to be the case of the Dissenters; who, tho' they may have mended some things, yet others, (of greater moment in my mind) they have altered for the worse; as in excluding all Episcopacy and Liturgies.

Supposing then nothing sinful in the terms of conformity, the arguments that principally prevailed with me were these two.

I

I. Whereas

1. Whereas the main difference between the establish'd Church and the Dissenters is, that the former useth a Liturgy for the publick worship of God, and the latter useth none; I, for that reason, prefer the former.

2. Altho' I did not think the former in itself preferable, but somewhat inferior to the Dissenters Churches; yet believing it to be for the main good, so far, that all things necessary to my edification and salvation may there be had, without complying with any thing in itself sinful; I think, so much is due to publick Order, Peace and Charity, that for the sake of these I ought to submit to the publick establishment. For tho' we may not submit to any thing that is sinful, nor to a service in which we cannot attain the necessary ends of communion; yet to one less edifying, I think, we may and ought in some cases to submit: And I take this to be such a case, (supposing the establish'd worship to be somewhat inferior to that of the Dissenters;) the consequences of a separation being found to be so bad, with respect to Religion and the happiness of Society.

To which I might add a third, (as intending Conformity in the quality of a Minister,) viz. the greater capacity for usefulness, that Conformist Ministers, as such, commonly have, than those of the Dissenters.

These things, Sir, have made great impression upon me. I have mentioned them very generally: for I could not do otherwise by Letter without tediousness: and it's not unlikely, but you may have seen and considered the same things before. And perhaps it is something (supposed sinful) in the terms of Conformity, that you scruple: and I knew not how to reply to that, unless you had mention'd something.

I pray

I pray God direct you to do that which is most pleasing to him, most for the common interest of Religion, and your own satisfaction.

I am,

S I R,

Your Sincere Friend,

and Servant to my Power,

JOSEPH CROMPTON.

*An ANSWER to a Second LETTER
from the same Person.*

Little-Ireton, April 29. 1719.

S I R,

AS an instance of something sinful in the terms of Conformity, you say, *that in effect we swear, when we subscribe and declare; and you cannot at present see, that that in Psal. cv. 28. can be sworn to in that sense, as it is worded in the Common-Prayer Version.*

ANS. A Minister, by subscribing and declaring what is requir'd, does not swear nor affirm, that *that* is a true translation, expressing the mind and meaning of the *Psalmist* in that place; as you seem to think.

I believe, there are various passages in holy Writ, as to which, (because of the difficulty of matter or phrase,) it is hard to say certainly, what *English* words truly express the meaning of the Author, and whether we have any extant translation that doth it. This is the more difficult, because of the various readings in the copies of the Original, in several places.

If therefore Clergymen were required to determine and swear, (as you call it,) that *this* is the true reading, and *that* is the true translation, expressing the meaning of the Author, it wou'd be hard upon them. But that is not required, that I know of; and I think I know of all the subscriptions and declarations that are required.

They are not required so much as to express their preference of this one translation before another, tho' they oblige themselves to the use of it in the publick Service. And if it be a sin to use a translation, because of an innocent mistake of the Translators, as I know no reason to prove it a sin, so I doubt, the consequence would be, that it would be a sin to use any translation at all.

I call it an innocent mistake; for so it is, if it be a mistake. The words referred to express nothing contrary to truth, or the Word of God. — *They* [meaning the *Egyptians*] *were not obedient to his* [i. e. God's] *Word*; as the history in *Exodus* sheweth.

And therefore, why we may not subscribe, *That they contain nothing contrary to the Word of God, and that they may lawfully so be used, and declare our consent to the use of them*, (which is the utmost that is required,) I know not.

I never saw any thing said against it, as sinful, but what was grounded on misrepresentation and aggravation; as, I am persuaded, a great part of what Dissenters say, in this controversy, for their own justification, is: as I said in my former Letter to you.

However, as they, no less than Conformists, may be sincere in what they say and do; and as we are all (one side as well as another) liable to error; and sincerity in this case is better than truth, and to be good Christians the main thing; it is fit, we should bear with one another in those things,

things, in which, we may hope, God will bear with all honest Christians.

Wherefore I conclude, praying, that we may be led into all necessary truth, and be kept from all dangerous error and presumptuous sin.

I am

Your Sincere Friend and Servant,

JOSEPH CROMPTON.

Spoken to the Congregation at Little-Ireton, March 22, 1718. before Sermon in the Afternoon.

I Have already acquainted some of you with my design of desisting from my publick ministry here. Perhaps it may be expected that I should at this time give some account of the reason of it: and I did design so to have done. But I shall only say this:

That tho' I have thought it the best way for me to conform to the established Church, after I have long consider'd, and read, and pray'd to God concerning it; yet I do by no means condemn those who think it is best for them to do otherwise.

That I shall be ready to satisfy any of you who shall desire it of me, what considerations have prevailed with me to make this alteration.

That I shall be ready, whilst I am amongst you, not only to have friendly converse with you, but to assist you in private the best I am able; and so far be your Minister still, and pray with you, whether sick or well: and I desire you would give me leave and opportunity so to do.

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Some perhaps may think it improper for me to be here after this alteration that I intend to make. As to which, if my conforming will be such an offence to you, that you cannot well bear it, and you will signify so much to me, I will remove as soon as I can conveniently. I desire you would speak your minds as to this when Sermon is over, for I would not have you uneasy at me. But if you can bear with me in that, I hope my being here will be to no body's disadvantage; I hope, it may in some measure be to our mutual advantage; unless it be either your fault or mine; and I will endeavour it shall not be mine.

I believe there is not much occasion to warn you against censoriousness and intemperate zeal in this matter of conformity and non-conformity. I am persuaded of your moderation. I desire, you would not only retain that spirit, but encourage it in others, and oppose the contrary. It is a controversy, about which men of greatest Learning and piety in this nation have differed, and do differ.

The difference is not great in itself, nor the error dangerous, on which side soever the error is. All sincere and good christians are in the way to heaven; whether they be in the one communion, or in the other: and none else but they are in the way; let them be of what Church they will.

Lay as much stress as you will upon real holiness and sincerity: but I am afraid that some Dissenters lay too much stress upon Non-conformity, as some Churchmen do upon Conformity. I am sorry for it; but I do not wonder at it: for I consider the weakness and frailty of mankind; how apt we are to contract strong prejudices by means of our education, or otherwise, and to conceive wrong of things, and to lead or follow one another into extremes.

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What is the difference? Have we not all one God; all one Saviour; all one Bible? Do not both teach one Doctrine? And are not their prayers and worship all one, as to substance? And do not we all hope for one heaven? I pray God give to all good christians, who hope for one heaven, more moderate and charitable sentiments towards one another.

Perhaps you may be troubled at my ceasing my publick Ministry amongst you: and so am I. But that is no more, than what happens as often as Ministers remove from one people to another: a thing that happens frequently. Nay, it is not so much as that; for at present I shall be amongst you; (unless you desire me to go further off;) and, whilst I am amongst you, shall be glad to do you what Service I can in a private capacity.

As for persuading you to follow my example, and conform; I say, follow no man's example, but your own conviction. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. Do that, which you believe is most pleasing to God, most for the common interest of Religion, and your own Edification: and then you will do right. I know no better rule. I repeat it again. Follow no man's example, but your own conviction. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. Do that, which you believe is most pleasing to God, most for the common interest of Religion, and your own edification: and then you will do right. I know no better rule. And tho' this rule lead one man to the Church, and another to the Meeting; yet they are both in the right, and do well to follow it. Therefore I would not have you be disturb'd at this seeming difference between you and me. I hope, both you and I may be in the way to Heaven; and in this very thing both do right: I am sure, we should both do
wrong,

wrong, if we did not follow our own persuasions in the matter. Perhaps you may hear talk, as if it were two Religions, that we are of: but such talk is the effect of great ignorance and prejudice; or else it is designed the better to support some party.

I thank you for all your respect to me. I have met with nothing else from any of you. I acknowledge, I have my self been edified by my Ministry *here*; and I *here* thank God for it: and if I have been a means of your edification, thank him too. I pray God forgive my imperfections and neglects, and yours also, during my ministry amongst you. Let us continue to pray for one another; and be sure to live piously and virtuously: and if we persevere so to do, surely, surely we shall meet in Heaven at last, and be all of one mind and Communion there. Which God grant we may, for Christ Jesus his sake. *Amen.*

COPY of a LETTER to my Mother.

Honoured MOTHER,

Little-Ireton,
April 1. 1719.

IT is likely you will hear of my having joined in Communion with the establish'd Church. I thought it became me to acquaint you with it my self: therefore I have written this for your satisfaction.

Perhaps you will be somewhat troubled at this news: but I desire and hope you will believe that I have not done this rashly and inconsiderately; that I have not done it without good and sufficient reason, (in mine own opinion;) that no unworthy
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views or motives of any sort have determined me to make this alteration; but that I have acted sincerely, according to my persuasion; and that after I had for a long time used the best means for my conviction: as reading, consideration, and prayer; In short, that I have done it with a good conscience.

I hope you may be satisfied in what I have done, if you further consider, that I may be as good a Christian, (and perhaps a more useful Minister,) and to you as dutiful and affectionate a Son; and in all other respects as good a man, and so as certainly in the way to heaven, being a Conformist as a Non-conformist.

If you should live to hear, and have cause to believe, that I am so changed, as not to be a good Man and a good Christian, or in any respect a worse Man or Christian; then you, (and all my friends) would have cause of trouble on my account. But I hope, by the grace of God, you will never have that cause.

Therefore, dear Mother, whatever people may say, be not troubled on the account of my conformity, as long as you believe me to be, as I hope I ever shall be, God's faithful, tho' unworthy Servant, and

Your Dutiful and

Affectionate Son, 'till Death,

JOSEPH CROMPTON.

COPY of a LETTER to Mr. Bourn.

*To the Reverend Mr. Bourn, at Bolton
in Lancashire.*

SIR,

Little-Ireton, April 1. 1719.

WHEN you have read the enclos'd to my Mother, you will see the design of it is to acquaint her with my having conformed to the establish'd Church; and likewise to prevent, what I can, any undue trouble and uneasiness in her mind upon that account.

But lest it should not have that effect, I desire you would, if there be occasion, use your endeavours with her to the same end, and endeavour to satisfy her as far as you believe she ought to be satisfied in this matter.

For tho' some, (both Conformists and Non-conformists) thro' weakness and prejudice think, and some thro' policy represent, or would have others think, that the difference is greater, and the error (on which side soever supposed to be) is worse than really it is; yet moderate, judicious and impartial men, on both sides, know and will own, that whoever is a truly pious and virtuous man, and in this particular, as to the choice of his Communion, a sincere man, doing as he is persuaded in his own mind, is in no dangerous error, which soever Communion his persuasion leads him to; but rather that he would be in a more dangerous error, if he did not follow his persuasion in this matter: and that it is the case of the uncharitable and hypocrites and wicked men of all sorts, that is to be lamented; and not that
of

of the charitable, sincere and religious, either amongst Conformists or Non-conformists.

I apply my self to you on this occasion out of tenderness for my Mother, and desire of her ease; being persuaded of your moderation and compassionate temper, and my Mother being one of your congregation.

I pray God to bless your labours, and the labours of all pious Ministers of every denomination amongst us, who endeavour to promote Christ's Religion, and oppose the Devil and his Kingdom; 'till all good men come to be of one mind, and of one communion: a thing to be wished for in this world, to be expected in the next. I am,

S I R,

Your Obliged,

Humble Servant,

JOSEPH CROMPTON.

COPY of a LETTER to Brother James.

Dear BROTHER,

Little-Ireton,
April 1. 1719.

WITHIN the inclosed Letter to Mr. *Bourn*, there is one to my Mother; which is to acquaint her with my having conformed to the establish'd Church, and to prevent her being unduly troubled at it.

But, lest my Letter should not have that effect, I have written the inclos'd to Mr. *Bourn*,
to

to desire him to use his endeavours with her to that end, if there be occasion.

And this is to desire you (after you have seen my Letter to Mother) to do the same; that is, endeavour to satisfy her, if she appear disturbed on this account. I think, there is that in my Letter to her, that may satisfy her, if she believe and consider it. For if my being a good Christian, and in this particular acting with a good conscience, be not sufficient ground of satisfaction to all, that wish me well, I know not what is. I am sure, the hopes hereof are the only ground of satisfaction in my self; and not my being Conformist or Dissenter, as such.

However, because some of my Friends about you may perhaps be disturbed at this alteration, that I have made, if you, as it shall fall in your way, endeavour with mild words to quiet the minds of such, I think, you will perform a good office; and you will oblige,

Your Loving Brother,

JOSEPH CROMPTON.



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